

## Family Plans for Disasters

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Organization leaders, local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. If disaster strikes, you need to know how to take care of yourself and your family. People can cope with disaster by preparing in advance and with families, and neighborhoods working together as a team. Preparing for a disaster or emergency is a responsibility that begins with each individual. We can't control all the emergencies that will occur in our lives, but we can be ready to face them by knowing what to do and taking action to prepare. Two things that will always help you in an emergency or disaster are clear thinking and quick reactions. If you can stay calm in a crisis, you'll be better able to make the right decisions. Once you decide the best action to take in a particular situation, do it! There's no room for hesitation in a disaster or emergency.

### Stock Emergency Supplies and Assemble a Disaster Kit

- Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs and those of each family member for one month or more if feasible. Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit with items you may need in an evacuation. Store these supplies in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffel bags or covered trash containers.
- Ask one person to be responsible for replacing water every three months and food every six months. Batteries should also be replaced on a regular basis. Tape the call letters and frequency numbers of your emergency alert radio stations (EAS) on the radio and make sure everyone knows how to work the radio and put in fresh batteries. Also tape the channel number of the television emergency broadcast stations on your TV.

### Meet with Your Family

Discuss the types of disasters and emergencies that are most likely to happen in your county and what to do in each case. Explain the dangers to children and plan to share the responsibilities, working as a team. If you have in-home childcare, include the caregiver in your plan. A Personal Action Plan is an important part of this process because it gives you a chance to think through what you would do in a real event. The plan includes information such as your local Emergency Alert System radio or television station, evacuation assembly centers in your neighborhood or area, emergency phone numbers, or alternate communication avenues and pet care arrangements. The information should be posted on your refrigerator or in some other prominent spot as well as included in your disaster kit.

### Determine Where to Meet After a Disaster Occurs

Determine where to meet after a disaster occurs--a place right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire; a place in your neighborhood for all neighbors to meet; a location outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Make wallet cards, so everyone will know the address and phone number of the place where you are to meet. For older children, select a "safe house" in areas they frequent — until it is safe to meet.

### Have an "Out-of-Town" Contact

Ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your contact. After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know the contact's phone number and cell phone number if they have one. Note: If telephones are not working, try e-mail. Sometimes e-mail gets through when calls cannot. Be aware that cell phones are often overloaded during and immediately after an emergency, so it is important to know "land line" phone numbers as well.

### Emergency Numbers

Post emergency numbers by all your phones (fire, police, ambulance, your physician, etc.). Teach your children how to call these numbers and when it is appropriate to do so. Include emergency numbers for water/sewer, electricity, gas and the National Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222.

### Know Your Community Warning Signals

Determine if your particular community has warning signals. If so, find out what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them. They will provide a conduit for distress calls in the event all communications are out and provide access to

emergency services and organization help.

Ask local authorities about methods used to warn your community.

### Community and Other Plans

Ask local officials the following questions about your community's disaster/ emergency plans. Does my community have a plan? Can I obtain a copy? What does the plan contain? How often is it updated? What should I know about the plan? What hazards does it cover?

In addition to finding out about your community's plan, it is important that you know what plans are in place for your workplace and your children's school or day care center.

1. Ask your employer about workplace policies regarding disasters and emergencies, including understanding how you will be provided emergency and warning information.
2. Contact your children's school or day care center to discuss their disaster procedures.

### School Emergency Plans

Know your children's school emergency plan:

- Ask how the school will communicate with families during a crisis.
- Ask if the school stores adequate food, water, and other basic supplies.
- Find out if the school is prepared to shelter in place if need be, and where they plan to go if they must get away.

In cases where schools institute procedures to shelter in place, you may not be permitted to drive to the school to pick up your children. Even if you go to the school, the doors will likely be locked to keep your children safe. Monitor local media outlets for announcements about changes in school openings and closings, and follow the directions of local emergency officials. For more information on developing emergency preparedness plans for schools, please log on to the U.S. Department of Education at [www.ed.gov/emergencyplan](http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan).